

## 2. Source of knowledge

What are the *Vedas*? The Sanskrit verbal root of *Veda* can be interpreted variously, but the purport is finally one. *Veda* means knowledge. Any knowledge you accept is *Veda*, for the teachings of the *Vedas* are the original knowledge. In the conditioned state, our knowledge is subjected to many deficiencies. The difference between a conditioned soul and a liberated soul is that the conditioned soul has four kinds of defects. The first defect is that he must commit mistakes. To err is human. This is one defect of the conditioned soul.

Another defect: to be illusioned. Illusion means to accept something which is not: maya. Maya means "what is not." Everyone is accepting the body as the self. If I ask you what you are, you will say, "I am Mr. John; I am a rich man; I am this; I am that." All these are bodily identifications. But you are not this body. This is illusion.

The third defect is the cheating propensity.

Everyone has the propensity to cheat others. Although a person is fool number one, he poses himself as very intelligent. Although it is already pointed out that he is in illusion and makes mistakes, he will theorize: "I think this is this, this is this." But he does not even know his own position. He writes books of philosophy, although he is defective. That is his disease. That is cheating.

Lastly, our senses are imperfect. We are very proud of our eyes. Often, someone will challenge, "Can you show me God?" But do you have the eyes to see God? You will never see if you haven't the eyes. If immediately the room becomes dark, you cannot even see your hands. So what power do you have to see? We cannot, therefore, expect knowledge (*Veda*) with these imperfect senses. With all these deficiencies, in conditioned life we cannot give perfect knowledge to anyone. Nor are we ourselves perfect. Therefore we accept the *Vedas* as they are.

The *Vedas* are not compilations of human knowledge. Vedic knowledge comes from the spiritual world, from Lord Krsna. Another name for the *Vedas* is *sruti*. *Sruti* refers to that knowledge which is acquired by hearing. It is not experimental knowledge. *Sruti* is considered to be like a mother. We take so much knowledge from our mother. For example, if you want to know who your father is, who can answer you? Your mother. If the mother says, "Here is your father," you have to accept it. It is not possible to experiment to find out whether he is your father. Similarly, if you want to know something beyond your experience, beyond your experimental knowledge, beyond the activities of the senses, then you have to accept the *Vedas*. There is no question of experimenting. It has already been experimented. It is already settled. The version of the mother, for instance, has to be accepted as truth. There is no other way.

If you make experimental endeavor, you come to the same conclusion, but just to save time you should accept. If you want to know who your father is and if you accept your mother as the authority, then whatever she says can be accepted without argument. There are three kinds of evidence: *pratyaksha*, *anumana* and *sabda*. *Pratyaksha* means "direct evidence." Direct evidence is not very good because our senses are not perfect. We are seeing the sun daily, and it appears to us just like a small disc, but it is actually far, far larger than many planets. Of what value is this seeing? Therefore we have to read books; then we can understand about the sun. So direct experience is not perfect. Then there is *anumana*, inductive knowledge: "It may be like this"-hypothesis. For instance, Darwin's theory says it may be like this, it may be like that. But that is not science. That is a suggestion, and it is also not perfect. But if you receive the knowledge from the authoritative sources, that is perfect. If you receive a program guide from the radio station authorities, you accept it. You don't deny it; you don't have to make an experiment, because it is received from the authoritative sources.

Vedic knowledge is called *sabda-pramana*. Another name is *sruti*. *Sruti* means that this knowledge has to be received simply by aural reception. The *Vedas* instruct that in order to understand transcendental knowledge, we have to hear from the authority. Transcendental knowledge is knowledge from beyond this universe. Within this universe is material knowledge, and beyond this universe is transcendental knowledge. All this knowledge is there, but how will you make experiments? It is not possible. Therefore you have to take the assistance of the *Vedas*. This is called Vedic knowledge. (Adapted from the Introduction to *Isopanisad* by HDG A.C. BhaktiVedanta Swami Prabhupada)

The disease of the modern civilized man is his disbelief of everything in the revealed scriptures. Faithless non-believers cannot make progress in spiritual realization, for they cannot understand the spiritual potency. The small fruit of a banyan contains hundreds of seeds, and in each seed is the potency to produce another banyan tree with

the potency to produce millions more of such fruits. This law of nature is visible before us, although how it works is beyond our understanding. This is but an insignificant example of the potency of Godhead; there are many similar phenomena that no scientist can explain.

Everything, in fact, is inconceivable, for the truth is revealed only to the proper persons. Although there are varieties of personalities, from Brahmā down to the insignificant ant, all of whom are living beings, their development of knowledge is different. Therefore we have to gather knowledge from the right source. Indeed, in reality we can get knowledge only from the Vedic sources. The four *Vedas*, with their supplementary *Purāṇas*, the *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and their corollaries, which are known as *smṛtis*, are all authorized sources of knowledge. If we are at all to gather knowledge, we must gather it from these sources without hesitation.

Revealed knowledge may in the beginning be unbelievable because of our paradoxical desire to verify everything with our tiny brains, but the speculative means of attaining knowledge is always imperfect. The perfect knowledge propounded in the revealed scriptures is confirmed by the great *ācāryas*, who have left ample commentations upon them; none of these *ācāryas* has disbelieved in the *śāstras*. One who disbelieves in the *śāstras* is an atheist, and we should not consult an atheist, however great he may be. A staunch believer in the *śāstras*, with all their diversities, is the right person from whom to gather real knowledge. Such knowledge may seem inconceivable in the beginning, but when put forward by the proper authority its meaning is revealed, and then one no longer has any doubts about it.

(Excerpt From: Caitanya Caritamrita, Aadilila, Chapter 5 Text 14 – purport)

#### Discovery

1. What do you understand by *Veda*?
2. What are the four defects?
3. Mention the 3 kinds of evidences for attaining knowledge?
4. What is the disease afflicting modern man with respect to the scriptures?
5. Which is the right source from which we have to gather knowledge?

#### Understanding

1. Is there any difference between Vedic knowledge and material knowledge?
2. Of the 3 kinds of evidences for acquiring knowledge which is the best?
3. Whom should we consult to gather the real knowledge? Why?
4. Why is revealed knowledge unbelievable in the beginning?

#### Application

1. Is Vedic knowledge scientific? Substantiate.
2. Is it possible to make it a part of our day to day activities?

#### SRI NAMAMRTA

*Perfect knowledge (and thus perfect activities) is derived from chanting the maha-mantra:*

Cetaḥ means "knowledge." Without perfect knowledge, one cannot act perfectly. The real source of knowledge is the vacah, or sound vibration, given by Vedic instructions. Here the word vacah, or vibration, means the Vedic vibration. The origin of creation is sound vibration, and if the sound vibration is clear and purified, perfect knowledge and perfect activities actually become manifest. This is enacted by the chanting of the maha-mantra,

Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.

(SB 4.24.43)

*PREACHING IS THE ESSENCE*

*Hearing (and chanting) the Vedic literature will bring peace and prosperity to the world:*

O King, it is therefore essential that every human being hear, glorify and remember the Supreme Lord Personality of Godhead always and everywhere.

And for hearing only, all the Vedic literatures are there, compiled by authorized persons like Vyāsadeva, who is the powerful incarnation of Godhead. And as it is ascertained that the Lord is the Supersoul of everything, He should therefore be heard and glorified everywhere and always. That is the special duty of the human being. And the human being, when he gives up the process of hearing about the all-pervading Personality of Godhead, becomes victim to hearing rubbish.... It is said here that it is incumbent upon the human beings to hear because the scriptures like Bhagavad-gita, Srimad-Bhāgavatam, etc., are made for that purpose. Living beings other than human beings have no capacity to hear such Vedic literatures. If the human society gives itself to the process of hearing the Vedic literature, it will not become victim to the impious sounds vibrated by impious men who degrade the standards of the total society. Hearing is solidified by the process of chanting. One who has perfectly heard from the perfect source becomes convinced about the all-pervading Personality of Godhead and thus becomes enthusiastic in the matter of glorifying the Lord. All the great ācāryas, like Rāmānuja, Madhva, Caitanya, Sarasvatī Ṭhākura or even, in other countries, Muhammad, Christ and others, have all extensively glorified the Lord by chanting always and in every place. Because the Lord is all-pervading, it is essential to glorify Him always and everywhere. In the process of glorifying the Lord there should be no restriction of time and space. This is called sanātana-dharma, or bhāgavata-dharma. Sanātana means eternal, always and everywhere. Bhāgavata means pertaining to Bhagavān, the Lord. The Lord is the master of all time and all space, and therefore the Lord's holy name must be heard, glorified and remembered everywhere in the world, and that will bring about the desired peace and prosperity so eagerly awaited by the people of the world.

(SB 2.2.36)